



The
Society
of the
Good
Companions



How the Unemployed are
solving their own problem

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THE SOCIETY OF THE GOOD COMPANIONS

(In coöperation with the National Council of Social Service).

The Society of the Good Companions is a Society of men and women who are attempting *successfully* to solve the problem of unemployment—the dominating social problem of the moment.

Their work is being carried on in coöperation with the National Council of Social Service and with their full support.

The stark reality of the problem lies in the universally accepted view that, owing to modern machinery and the shrinkage of world markets, we are faced with a permanent army of at least 1,500,000 unemployed men and women of all ages.

Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York very aptly defined the task which confronts the nation in dealing with the situation, as “how to turn enforced idleness into well-directed leisure.”

The Society of the Good Companions has sprung into being to meet this need.

The Society of the Good Companions is largely the creation of unemployed men and women themselves. It has demonstrated that among the British unemployed

there is vitality, intelligence, resourcefulness, and a genuine desire to solve their own human problem. They are not waiting for politicians, but are themselves tackling this problem of enforced idleness with enthusiasm.

Originating with a group of unemployed men in Stafford, the Society of the Good Companions has rapidly extended to many parts of the Black Country, Staffordshire and Salop. It took the form of the establishment, in August, 1932, of an occupational and recreational centre under the title of the "Good Companions Club," where facilities for the proper use of leisure were provided.

Musical, literary and dramatic activities, and arts and crafts were the first interests catered for, closely followed by the cultivation of allotments and gardens, small holdings and poultry farms, in conjunction with the Society of Friends, to make the Club and its members partially self-supporting.

The movement rapidly spread to some forty towns and villages in the midlands, and is still spreading. As the Society grew, the scope of its interest widened. The original Good Companions Clubs were superseded by Community Houses—centres for all the functions of the movement—wherein were housed Good Companions Clubs and the special centres of community service, land cultivation, broadcast education, study groups, etc.

Thus the Society of the Good Companions in its later stage of development functions through :—

- (a) A COMMUNITY HOUSE—a centre in which are located all local activities concerned with the enforced idleness and the increasing leisure of all classes.

This provides daytime occupational, recreational, and cultural interests for the unemployed. But it is not necessary to be unemployed to join in the activities of a Community House, for employed workers also take part when they



(By courtesy of the
"Express and Star," Wolverhampton.)

H.R.H. Prince George taking a cup of
tea at the Good Companions Club,
Wolverhampton.

are free. The importance of eliminating any distinctions between the two classes cannot be exaggerated.

Men and women here engage in making and mending their own boots, clothes, furniture, garden equipment, etc. Here they can obtain material at cost price for re-decorating their own houses and developing their gardens or land obtained for them at a nominal charge.

Making toys for the children is another branch of work which enables the Good Companions to act as Father Christmas to the children of the local unemployed.

Study groups on social, economic and purely cultural subjects fill in many hours, all aiming towards the creation of a spirit of community service by the individuals comprising them.

Canteens, also run by the men themselves, provide meals at cost price, or in some cases, free in return for definite service. The men have their own benevolent funds which they administer to help "Companions in more dire need than themselves."

These houses are recognised by the public authorities as pioneering an entirely new feature of our social life.

- (b) A GOOD COMPANIONS CLUB—mainly used by unemployed men for

social, occupational and benevolent purposes, all the time seeking to direct the energies of its members into constructive channels.

- (c) A HOUSE OF THE GOOD COMPANIONS—frequently staffed by University and Public-school men, who are voluntary workers maintaining themselves—for individual personal service amongst the unemployed and advising and assisting in the day-by-day problems arising from dire poverty. These houses concern themselves particularly with the distressed areas where there is no local support, by feeding and clothing necessitous children and caring for the sick.



(By courtesy of the "Express and Star," Wolverhampton.)

Unemployed Good Companions mending their own boots.

The majority of the Good Companions' centres are more or less adequately supported locally, but there is nothing left over to help those distressed areas in which people are physically and morally "rotting" through sheer hopelessness—a hopelessness born of utter despair in the prospect of never finding work again. How can they feel otherwise when they have seen the factories in which they worked dismantled and the sites razed to the ground, worked-out coal-pits sealed, and every sign of industrial activity depart from their midst. The sense of depression is not lightened for these unfortunates when they know themselves powerless to move from their own stricken areas into others where the problem, if less intense, is none the less serious.

Can it be wondered at that when the Good Companions went into these desolated areas they were warmly welcomed? Here, these workless and abandoned communities felt, was a gesture from their own people—people who knew, people who understood, as only those who had suffered, and were suffering, similar conditions, could know and understand—and they were in that measure responsive and grateful.

The help that these Good Companions have brought to the genuinely distressed areas has been personal service *but nothing else*. They must be reinforced in their work by funds from outside.

The activities of the Society of the Good Companions cover 25,000 unemployed men, eligible for membership; of these some

10,000 are paying their subscription of one penny per week to the forty-three centres now in being, and their number is increasing daily.

But this great work, which breathes the spirit of goodwill and unselfish service, is seriously handicapped for lack of money.

There is no more deserving cause in the whole field of national welfare than that of the Good Companions.

It is a movement not superimposed from above, but spontaneously created by the needy themselves—not devised so much to help the unemployed as to provide the means by which the unemployed can help themselves.

SOCIETY OF THE GOOD COMPANIONS.